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The Senate's Current Priority is to Pass the Appropriation Bills

[Editor's Note: On May 18 on the Senate Floor, Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY) offered some insight into the Senate's appropriations process as the fiscal deadline approaches. The following are (slightly edited) excerpts from that statement.]

I feel compelled to give a brief explanation of why there is a quorum call, or why we are not proceeding with the business of this country. In the Senate, we have to get permission to proceed to debate a bill. That is where we are right now, trying to get permission to proceed to debate an appropriations bill. The Democrats have decided, because of a procedural motion on which they lost yesterday, that we are not going to debate anything for a while.

What we are having is a filibuster — it is being done rather silently — over whether we are going to debate any of the appropriations bills. What the Democrats say is that if we can't debate extraneous, nongermane items on the appropriations bills, we are going to see that the business of this country does not go forward. I think that is wrong and I think the American people need to know about it.

The voters need to know what is happening: We have 13 appropriations bills to pass in order to fund the federal government, and it usually takes a week to pass each one, and we have about 13 weeks left of the session this year. We are debating now whether or not you can come down here and just stick in any amendment you want, on any issue you want, and call it 'deliberative debate.'

We have a Senate rule that says you can't legislate on an appropriations bill. But there is a loophole there. It isn't clear whether you can pontificate on an appropriations bill, whether you can stick in something that is your pet project and talk ad infinitum on it. That is what the silence is about. That is what the inability to go forward is about. It is about whether we ought to be able to pontificate on anything we want to, whether or not it is relevant to the spending bill that is up.

We should be at the business of taking the appropriations bills we have and deciding on each and every issue that is in that appropriation bill to see if it is the right thing to do. When we finish up the 13 appropriations bills, we can go back to the regular legislation of this body. On those other bills, there is no requirement on

what can be added to them. You can debate and put in an amendment whether or not it has anything to do with the bill. That is, there isn't a rule that keeps you from doing nongermane amendments on the regular legislative business; it is only on the appropriations bills.

Why would we do that? Why would there be requirements on what can be debated when we are talking about appropriations? Because it is our business to make sure we deliberate and pass these bills before October 1.

It is difficult to bring debate to a close in this body. We had before us as an amendment to the military construction appropriations bill, the funding bill that provides the resources our military needs at home and abroad to protect our national security, and this amendment was a sense of the Senate, nonbinding, that said the juvenile justice bill should be resolved between the House and the Senate by next week. And it had to be done. Well, it isn't going to be done. It can't be done. They demanded 12 hours of debate on that issue — 12 hours of debate holding up the Senate. That issue is important to a lot of Members, but we already debated it and sent it to the conference committee. Does it deserve another 12 hours of debate when we are on appropriations measures?

The job that we ought to be doing right now is getting the appropriations bills of this country done as fast as we possibly can, as deliberately as we possibly can, as carefully as we possibly can, but getting it done and sticking to the issue of what is in or related to that appropriations bill. Those are the amendments that we ought to be debating — not bringing in peripheral amendments and saying I think I can delay this whole bill so that the President can negotiate it later.

If we don't get some agreement to proceed on this bill, we will check and see if there are other appropriations bills the Democrats believe are important enough to debate. One that has cleared the committee is agriculture. I have to tell you that I think the farmers across this country are going to be pretty livid if this bill is being held up because somebody has a sense of the Senate amendment, where they want to see if all of the Senators kind of "feel good" about something that doesn't have to do with agriculture. They ought to be livid about it.

When I go home, my constituents say: How come you guys put nonrelated stuff in bills? They want the amendments to be germane and they want the bill debated in a timely fashion. They think we ought to be getting on with our business.

The debate should be moving on. The debate should not be held up over whether we can do feel-good amendments on appropriations. The debate should center around whether an appropriations bill is justified or not justified, whether we ought to spend the money or we ought not to spend the money, whether the program is good or whether the program is bad. That is the appropriations process. We have plenty of it to do as we spend close to \$2 trillion.